

I. Executive Summary

Throughout much of 2002 CCPF organized and executed a project that was designed to identify the attributes associated with locally raised products and then develop a mechanism that would emphasize these qualities via customer interaction and signage at the point of purchase.

Through that effort it was determined that while some states may possess a “signature” food, i.e. “Vermont Cheddar”, the majority of consumers are looking for fresh and wholesome foods, ideally at as attractive a price as possible. They know that foods raised in close proximity to their homes are more likely to deliver those desirable qualities and in most cases simply need a reminder that the local product is available to purchase locally raised foods. While price often plays a role in the buying decision it is also likely that the “non-local” product will lose in a taste comparison. Provided that the price is within reason – say \$0.30 - \$0.50 per lbs. as opposed to \$3.00 - \$5.00 per lbs. – tastings will help stimulate a favorable consumer reaction to the locally-raised foods.

Due to the mix of products selected for the study there were none that looked significantly different from the competition. Retailers believe that consumers “buy with the eye” so there may be a challenge that the local apple, for example, may face when compared to the shipped apple. However, with the likelihood that in-season products can compete with out-state products on price then taste – and freshness – should win the day.

By studying the attributes of the products selected for the study; creating signage that incorporated images associated with the local agricultural industry; offering tastings that raised customer confidence in the locally-raised product; and making sure that product was on the shelves, the study identified a fairly straightforward strategy easily adapted by any state or region with quality agricultural output. It is clear that unless the sponsoring agency for the state/region adopting these qualities must overcome an incredibly negative perception or lacks the quality of agricultural output to be competitive with products from out-state that these guidelines should allow their farmers to compete for consumer dollars and win.

Additionally, consumers understood the economic impact of buying locally raised food. Keeping money in their community/state/region while not the primary justification makes what can be a marginally larger expense justifiable. While the thrust of the campaign never focused on this message it would be a worthwhile consideration for a subsequent effort. However, it should be understood that much as consumers abandoned the American car makers in droves when there was a perception that American-made cars were inferior a “buy local” campaign is unlikely to succeed without the advantage of procuring a fresh, wholesome product.

The total budget for this study was over \$129,000 with over \$68,000 coming from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and CCPF.